

Turkey

Domestic terrorism and evolving threats



Situation

The ongoing terror attacks in Turkey are a continuation of long-standing domestic issues facing Ankara, overlaid by the new, evolving threat posed by Islamic extremist groups. The attacks, which reflect each terror groups' strategic intentions, can be summarised into three broad groupings, with each group following a differing agenda and operational approach:

- Kurdish militant (such as the Kurdistan Workers Party [PKK])
- Domestic extremist (including Marxist Leninist, anti-Western and anti-NATO groups – such as the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party–Front [DHKP-C])
- Islamic militant (specifically, Islamic State [IS])

Each group's ambitions are reflected in their choice of targets (the public, government, police and military); and also have a bearing on their mode of attack (firearm, improvised explosive device or suicide attack). So while there have been a number of IS attacks in Turkey on public spaces and specific anti-IS or pro-Kurdish campaign groups; militant groups aligned with the issue of Kurdish self-determination – who have undertaken many more attacks over the past 12 months – continue to focus on the police, military, government and the rule of law – traditional targets for terrorist attacks globally.

In fact, the latter grouping accounted for 72% (214) of the attacks in Turkey over the past 12 months. Of the 296 total recorded terror attacks in Turkey over the past year, only 15 were carried out by IS, four of which were carried out against traditional targets. It is also interesting to note that IS favoured attacking individuals, public spaces, the media, educational figures and medical staff by a factor of almost 3:1 versus more traditional, state targets.

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Recent attacks also reflect counter-terrorism efforts carried out by the Turkish government and its state of political engagement with various terrorist organisations. The PKK, for example, has accelerated attacks in recent months as a result of government offensives against PKK infrastructure in the south east of the country, and Kurdish successes in Syria.

Stalled negotiations have historically triggered further attacks as a means to apply additional pressure to discussions. While there has been some success in degrading the PKK in the south east of the country, there is concern that the threat has been displaced from urban centres to the surrounding country, with the potential that at some point in the future, the threat will return.

Impacts

Attacks have a strong geographic correlation, with 80% of terror attacks occurring to the east of a line drawn between Iskenderun on the Mediterranean and Hopa on the Black Sea. The focus of attacks to the West of that line is centred on Istanbul and Ankara, with the majority targeting police, government and the military.

Businesses located near or within police, military or government facilities, or close to concentrations of personnel, should consider the potential for being collaterally damaged should terror groups – particularly domestic - target these state institutions.

Recent attacks by IS in Turkey have grabbed international headlines, but the threat from terrorist attacks – particularly those that have been domestically motivated - has been a persistent and ongoing thorn in Turkey's side for several years. While the focus of attacks has traditionally been the state, there has been little international media attention in spite of the scale and tempo of incidents.

There remains concern however that IS will continue to target public spaces in Ankara, Istanbul and potentially at Turkish resorts, using either high-explosive or active shooter attacks, in line with their approach elsewhere in the world. To date, the majority of IS attacks in Turkey have targeted pro-Kurdish groups and individuals close to the Syrian border.

Considerations for organisations

Risk Mitigation

Individual organisations can reduce the attractiveness of their operations to terror attack, and limit the freedom of an attacker to access their building and their people.

Over the last 10 years there has often been a focus on vehicle-borne explosive devices, with investment in hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM) barriers to protect properties. When employed successfully these present a strong deterrence to attack, while limiting the impact of a detonation on people and infrastructure by keeping the point of detonation away from people and assets. However, the attack on Brussels showed the ineffectiveness of HVM when attackers carry an explosive device in a suitcase or on their bodies – or if the attacker/s employ firearms.

Person-borne suicide devices are a challenge for security services, let alone individual companies. The approach considered in the aftermath of the Brussels airport attack - employing 100% security screening at entrances to terminals – has the potential to result in a concentration of people waiting to enter premises. This will create a new, potential target for attackers, moving the point of detonation or attack to pedestrian entry points; it does not necessarily solve the problem.

Protecting your people and assets

Key considerations

Building resilience



Own access points



Segregate public areas and employee areas



Create safe areas



Establish response protocols

Raising awareness



Liaison with police



Threat awareness



Proximity to targets



Employer responsibility

Risk mitigation should include consideration of the following:

- Where practical, and if the local threat justifies it, HVM should be considered to provide defence at the furthest limit from your buildings and assets; acknowledging that additional measures will be required to defeat person-borne devices and armed attackers
- Own the access points into your building. Be able to minimise access during periods of heightened security and lock-down access rapidly
- Have the ability to establish hard segregation between any public reception area and the wider employee, traveller or guests areas – the intention should be to significantly delay the ability of an attacker to roam your premises. This could include, for example, remotely locking down elevator access and locking access controls into service areas. With free access, terrorists can do a great deal of damage if police armed response is 20 minutes away
- Unless there is a real and present threat to staying within a building, consider having shelter in place after a person-borne suicide attack to ensure you do not evacuate people into further danger (secondary attacks by terrorists)
- Consider establishing active shooter protocols – there is well developed open source guidance in this area to prepare managers and employees on actions if a hostile threat is identified within an organisation's premises
- Proximity to police, military, public transport hubs, public spaces, high-profile buildings or individuals may increase the potential to be impacted by terrorist events
- Recognise that it is the police or state security response that will address and defeat a hostile individual and that this response may be some time away. Critically, liaison with the police prior to an event is vital to understanding how long this may be, what information they will need when they arrive on site and what you can do to facilitate their actions
- While there is an opportunistic element to terrorism targeting, it remains a worthwhile activity to regularly assess the risk posed by terrorism to your organisation, in order to inform risk mitigation and ultimately, risk transfer
- For an employer or operator of a property, consider your ability to demonstrate you have done all that is reasonable and practical to provide a safe environment and establish appropriate responses. Good governance of this risk will avoid future labels of negligence or suggestions of poor risk management.

Internal emergency risk assessment and planning should be considered a prerequisite. Minimising the potential for mistakes in implementation can only be achieved through regular practice - by challenging the planning assumptions around a response. It is also important to maintain the experience of the team and reduce turnover in the management responsible for security and response delivery.

Risk Transfer

A terrorism property damage and business interruption policy will remain a cornerstone for any terrorism insurance programme, and should be refined to reflect the impacts from terrorism we see today. Furthermore, the potential for casualties suggests that lines covering death, injury and evacuation should be reviewed to establish they are fit for purpose.

Potential liability arising from an attack on property or people should be recognised. For example, a potential exposure would be the poor implementation of a planned response to a terror attack (be that by an active shooter, bomb or postal attack). Unintentionally exposing employees to the threat by:

- evacuating them into danger
- poor communication
- or implementing good plans in an uncoordinated manner

A poor response may expose even well-prepared companies to charges that not enough was done or that the company's actions made things worse.

Work with your broker to answer:

- Where you are exposed to terrorism
- What are the potential impacts across property and casualty lines
- What lines of insurance can support you in the event of a terror incident

This will help to define your strategy and ensure that you invest appropriately in those lines that best reflect your exposure to these extraordinary threats.

Connect with your Aon team to discuss any of the information presented above; we are here to help.

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